questions de communication

Questions de communication

6 | 2004
Intellectuels, médias et médiations. Autour de la Baltique

Intellectuals, the media, and forms of mediation

Around the Baltic

Jan Ekecrantz and Kristian Feigelson

Translator: Inist

OpenEdition Journals

Electronic version
URL: http://journals.openedition.org/questionsdecommunication/8858
DOI: 10.4000/questionsdecommunication.8858
ISSN: 2259-8901

Publisher
Presses universitaires de Lorraine

Printed version
Date of publication: 1 December 2004
ISBN: 978-2-86480-848-0
ISSN: 1633-5961

Electronic reference
Jan Ekecrantz and Kristian Feigelson, « Intellectuals, the media, and forms of mediation », *Questions de communication* [Online], 6 | 2004, Online since 01 February 2014, connection on 01 May 2019. URL : http://journals.openedition.org/questionsdecommunication/8858 ; DOI : 10.4000/questionsdecommunication.8858

Intellectuals, the media, and forms of mediation

Around the Baltic

Jan Ekecrantz and Kristian Feigelson

Translation : Inist

EDITOR'S NOTE

This English translation has not been published in printed form/Cette traduction anglaise n'a pas été publiée sous forme imprimée.

1 Since the Middle Ages, from the era of the Vikings to that of the Danish, Estonian and other buccaneers, the vast regional group around the Baltic Sea has formed an area of intersections and exchanges. Paraphrasing the "glocal"[1] concept, we may refer to this as a "Globaltic" area involving, in terms of both time and space, a significant nodal aspect more than an actual designated or assigned place. The "networked society" is not the product of digitalised telecommunication – it was able to exist several hundred years before the emergence of the new information technologies. It has combined the effects of trade, migrations, invasions, and so on, thanks to the different means of transport and communication used throughout the course of history[2].

2 Thus we may ask whether the issue of "global" and "local/national" has been a fundamental priority in the constitution of this area. Global conditions may be analysed in terms of their ubiquity and their opposition – they do not really change local data in this initial, immediate perception since, when they are faced with the global aspect, forms of cultural and counter-cultural resistance are recreated. They may be expressed as a confrontation between the issue of universalism and that of particularism – both homogenisation and heterogenisation then become the extreme poles of the interpretation of these continuous interferences between global, local and national.

However, these levels of what we may call "translocal" are not self-evident; they are the result of various exchanges and historical communication processes.

3 In the wake of historians of the likes of Fernand Braudel (1949) for the Mediterranean, Régis Boyer, Maurice Gravier and Pierre Jeannin (1981) for the Baltic, and Neal Ascherson (1996) for the Black Sea, a great many authoritative sources – such as Matti Klinge (1994) and David Kirby (1995) – are used to interpret the configurations of the power that are currently taking shape in this Baltic area. By tracing, for example, both the routes and the roots of these economic and political dominations over the centuries, we are better equipped to understand the present – the cartography of land masses, ports, rivers and all the resources of the *Mare Balticum*, in order thereby to reinterpret the effects of power in its figuration of the territory, in its way of reformulating all the frontiers, from the centres to the peripheries, from the capitals to the provinces, involving a series of political and cultural constructions in the history of these societies, analysed here from the viewpoint of mediation. These geographies of power reflect certain images of intellectuals having to face both collective memory issues and amnesia issues, depending on circumstances. In the context of a set of representations that have been able to contribute to the construction of the nation State and to its mythologisation around the Baltic, what are the new forms of mediation currently at the interface between intellectuals and the media?

4 The contemporary cultures of the media and journalism may be apprehended in conceptions that are spatial and temporal, geographical and historical, since this Baltic area is as much a geophysical reality as a political and cultural construction reinvented over the centuries. Spatial, yet local – both at the centre and on the periphery –, is this reality not in fact increasingly dependent on an economic world where territories, like an appropriated area, become the intermediate level of local? This implies profound questioning as to identity, and we have brought together here the views of a number of researchers – on either side of the Baltic – for a comparative analysis and reinterpretation, in their respective contexts, of the interface of the issues covered in this report[3].

An identity in question

5 In the space of a decade, the "Globaltic", which covers a diversity of societies and a heterogeneous mix of peoples, has undergone substantial upheaval. As a geographical area constructed around an enclosed sea, the question of its true identity is raised repeatedly. None of the names applied – Balt, Baltic, Nordic, Scandinavian, European and post-Soviet – seems to be entirely satisfactory to all the parties concerned. If we take into account all the societies bordering this sea, the entity stretches far beyond the actual Baltic States. The influences are Scandinavian to the west, more European to the south, and Russian to the east. Strictly speaking, the Baltic States alone belonged to the Russian State for nearly two centuries. Then, unlike the former Soviet republics, they were "sovietised" much later, during the post-war period. Since 1991, rejecting the prospect of joining the Community of Independent States (CIS), the three Baltic republics, supported by their close Scandinavian neighbours, were keen to join the European Union (EU) quickly, in order to erase all trace of the old wounds connected with the USSR. Throughout this area, the discourse on identity reaching beyond mere frontier-related issues has become omnipresent. Whereas in common parlance, the Baltic entity includes

Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, this is not always relevant, since Estonia, whose language as in Finland is Finno-Ugric, does not consider itself Baltic (particularly when it comes to joining the EU before its two neighbours). The Baltic/Scandinavian concept cropped up when these countries joined NATO, marking the emergence of a new area under its influence. The media really did become dominant at that point, whereas the intellectuals (or the former intelligentsia) seemed on the whole, and for a variety of reasons, to have been stripped of their traditional mediation functions. More than a decade after the fall of the USSR – a major phenomenon which reshuffled the geopolitical cards – this area perceived as being shaped in terms of identity by the more transverse appellation of "Balt" functions and communicates differently. Certain countries (Russia, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, etc) are often referred to as being on the eastern shores of the Baltic. Subjected during history to a totalitarian system, the public area of these countries is reconstituting itself on completely new foundations, opposite neighbouring countries (Sweden, Finland) which are facing the crisis of a diversified public area and are investing massively – with domineering prerogatives – in these new communication markets. What then are the results of cultural interferences in an area of regional re-composition where intellectuals, who traditionally form the category of mediation, have both fallen out of public awareness and lost their previous status? In these societies, a loss of meaning, combined with a crisis in creation, is taking place at a profound level, as if the constitution of a new, more democratic, public space had engendered a general crisis in the values connected with mass consumerism and the commodification of culture. In the space of ten years, the number of cinema theatres has been divided by ten and attendance figures by twenty, which represents a drop from 80 to 4 million cinemagoers. We see the same phenomenon in the field of film production. Furthermore, throughout this area, the media sector escapes neither the competition that exists in a deregulated audiovisual market nor the financialisation of trade with the existence – and reinforcement – of the concentration of press and multimedia audiovisual groups, embarking on mergers and innovation processes, not to mention the increasingly important role played by the Internet, which is developing a more citizen-based, grass-roots democratic form of communication.

The territory – the new challenge facing the media

6 The case of the Baltic offered an exemplary frame of reference in the post-1989 transformations for going into greater depth, from a comparative viewpoint, in the first east/west research on interculturality (cf. *Questions de Communication*, 2003). For example, a concept such as "Baltic Scandinavia" minimises the issue since it reflects an approach that is over-geographical with regard to the disappearance of bipolar axes (Auchet, 1999). In the framework of a traditional east/west territorial divide resulting from the Cold War, these configurations seem to be totally outdated. The "east" appears to fall into an imagined category that is as distorted as it is out of place – at least in the discourse of the western media –, as if the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, one of the most unexpected and most mediatised events of the 20th century, made it necessary to reconsider the relationship with other people beyond the simplifying ideological codes that have been debated so often. And yet the dismantling of the USSR and German reunification have had lasting effects throughout this area, which has become more open. By questioning various public spheres in operation around a Baltic Sea that is theoretically enclosed, it has also

involved re-thinking the current trend of scattering visible in traditional territorial references (like the former Hanseatic League spreading from Gdansk/Riga/Tallinn to Visby then Stockholm) in contact with new symbolic frontiers which function as a model (like the Europe exported by its elite groups first to Helsingfors and then to Saint Petersburg in the 18th century and re-appropriated by Peter the Great, recreating an artificial European city from scratch around a port with the opportunities offered by the Baltic). However, it is also necessary to understand how the media have, and have not, contributed to the creation of new cultural interferences among other geopolitical entities. In market terms, the area seems to be innovative: it supposes differentiated forms of appropriations that call on both new players on the media scene and new information technologies, although the status of trading within the inter-Baltic community appears to be relatively marginal. Within the global economy, as in Europe, the Baltic area appears to be minor despite the quantitative potential of the Russian and Polish markets. This research supposes several facets since it questions the audiovisual institutions – some of which are only recently created, on the basis of a western model – and the involvement of technologies as well as the penetration of new models and information media which have in some cases had a profound effect on the traditional status accorded to intellectuals. One question stands: regarding the traditional elites, how, after 1990, did the new grafts function since they suppose the constitution of powerful new media groups, the appearance of new entrepreneurial elites, and the rejection of imported models? They did indeed overturn professional hierarchies and newspaper production. They also brought about an identity-based reversion to a "provincial" press at the same time as an extension of the commercial sphere using the cultural practices in vogue in television circles, to the detriment of cinematographic production (apart from Finland, which is more dynamic in terms of production). For the past decade, in this Baltic area, the media have contributed to the reconstruction of new social models independent of these historic differences. Even so, it is not possible to talk of homogenisation – this report points to the different forms of continuity and discontinuity introduced into a common geographical area, in order to understand the impact of globalisation beyond the specific nature of each of the countries analysed. The Baltic area as a place for mediations – the product of disparate influences – makes it possible to reveal the pertinence of a more communicational approach to the issue which brings out watersheds eroding the east/west divide in favour of more scattered, even delocalised, centres in Europe.

Issues concerning communication

7 In order to analyse these mutations and describe them, the contributors to this issue make use of concepts and methods taken from a number of disciplines (history, sociology, etc), incorporating them with communicational issues and perspectives dealing with space and time in order to approach the processes of cultural transformation. Through the example of the Baltic, they show how communication takes an active part in territorial mutations in places that are often helpless to deal with the issues they have to face. By claiming their attachment to the Atlantic in order to liberate themselves from the proximity of their powerful continental neighbour – Russia – yet still wanting a toehold in the European continent, the Baltic States embody membership of a shared Europe, experienced as a legend. Like Poland – pro-American and wary about the idea of a

European constitution – Sweden, which is at the forefront for export markets thanks to its multinationals, is continuing to develop a strong anti-Brussels feeling, recently refusing to join the euro single currency area – unlike Finland, over-keen on diversifying its trading partners since the collapse of the USSR, on which it remains extremely dependent. The extended Baltic area is an example of a development model that is more often composite than complementary, and indeed where competition is very strong. The idea of an integrated market comes up against realities that are both historic and economic, and this dynamic is also reflected in the current media market. It is this problem area that is addressed by the contributions.

8 In "Dreams, propaganda, misunderstandings", Yves Plasseraud raises the subject of the debate in post-Communist cultures. The discourse on change that is imprisoned in the concept of an ethnic nation has supposed constraints and strong interdependencies within an intelligentsia that is a vector for the idea of independence upheld by Popular Front movements. In the media sector, the new Scandinavian imperialism plays on its former presence to be able to invest massively in these provinces. Today, this intelligentsia – an essential category in mediation – is being ignored and abandoned in the set-up of new merchant societies that redefine the relationship between individuals and collective groups. Yves Plasseraud points out the divides across the area: Estonia with its Finno-Ugric Protestant origins, Latvia considering itself Baltic despite being home to a large Russian minority, and Catholic Lithuania faced with the influence of its Polish neighbours. At the far end of the Baltic, Saint Petersburg, the traditional focal point of Russia's Europeanised, cosmopolitan intelligentsia, where German, Swedish and Finnish communities used to rival Moscow, represents for Russia the last window open onto the Baltic, after the loss of its maritime facade and the Baltic ports with the collapse of the USSR. Saint Petersburg has become Russia's bridgehead in the EU because of its immediate proximity and because of the status of the city, which has been upgraded in Russian federal policy. At the time of the collapse of the USSR, this Russian part of the Baltic had already created its own cultural, liberal television channel – which has since disappeared – which used to broadcast to nearly 40 million viewers. In "The Lost Dream of the Russian Intelligentsia", Charles Urjewicz points to the changes that have affected the Russian intelligentsia, particularly in Saint Petersburg, both in the traditional conception of its role and in its functions. For example, since perestroika and the end of public censorship (or *glasnost*, i.e. transparency regarding the media), the constitution of a commercial and hegemonic media model, linked with a small number of large multimedia groups such as MOST and ORT, which are close to the politico-industrial complex and to the Kremlin, not far removed from Silvio Berlusconi's ideas on the "show-time" society. The model is both controlled and open; does it pave the way for a different conception of the cultural industries that is suited to the new post-Soviet set-up? From another point of view, Maria Holubowicz asks the same questions, and analyses the profound transformations that are affecting "The Polish Intelligentsia, 1989-2003: a mistreated ethos", facing an identity crisis caused by the scale of the changes that have taken place. Stripped of its traditional messianic role, how does this intelligentsia perceive a different mediation culture, charged with reformulating the postulates of universality on the basis of the legitimacy granted to journalists? How may we analyse today the role and future of such an intelligentsia through the prism of the changes that have taken place in Poland? A pioneer in opening up its public space to the privatisation of its media, and despite Finlandisation and the proximity of the USSR (which supposes a

number of disputes between the two countries, including the issue of the annexation of eastern Karelia by the Soviets in March 1940), Finland is in a particularly original situation, as Risto Alapuro demonstrates in "Intellectuals and the Media", using sociological classification models that point to a deeply divided intelligentsia, affected in some cases by their Swedish origins, while others stand apart from the Russian hegemonic model. Lastly, in "The Media and the Public Sphere in Sweden – the emergence of a new hegemony", Peter Dahlgren considers the functioning of the public sphere in Sweden, mainly turned towards resolving practical, and even technical, questions, imprisoned by an ambient provincialism in which the notion of "intellectual" still carries pejorative connotations. Intellectuals apprehended the passage from the Social Democrat, corporatist welfare State towards its neo-Liberal forms in which the audiovisual scene, while currently reflecting a degree of diversity in the public sphere, has generated fragmentation by relegating intellectuals to ghettos and isolating them. As a result, in a context of a new European framework, how are the conditions for diversity and mediation to be replayed, both in Sweden and on the other sides of the Baltic?

Intellectuals – strangers near and far

9 Experienced by intellectuals – redefined here as an organic category of these societies –, the relationship with others constitutes the essential matrix for the questioning in this report. The Baltic area constantly reactivates this relationship with others since proximity has encouraged investments of all kinds – cultural, affective and economic. Other people – a source of intellectual controversy – appear as a subject of discord leading to a re-evaluation of, for example, the notion of citizenship in the Baltic States. While the term "other people" refers to a minority and to foreigners, it is dependent on a frequently over-imaginary acceptance of the joint – although sometimes not shared – reference to Europe. With the opening up of frontiers, this idea of proximity has never seemed so distant. How, in this context, when a number of Scandinavian multimedia groups (Danish, Swedish, Norwegian, etc) have launched financial operations and repurchases in the Baltic countries (Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia), are we to explain new logics of communication? This phenomenon supposes exclusivities, rejection phenomena, and inegalitarian social and cultural constructions widening the gap between east and west, despite the ideologised and apparently consensual discourse on Europe. Globalisation also contributes to the erasure of the national identity level and reactivates a set of cleavages among intellectuals, who are in turn subjected to a series of tensions and are incapable of redefining their respective roles. It suggests new forms of interdependence and networking, and the absence of a centralising reference point, even if the pan-European discourse may serve as sediment. Far from proposing a new identity-based reference, this globalisation affects the former structures, disconcerts the intelligentsia, and disturbs the traditional forms of expertise. In this respect, the Baltic area echoes our own self-questioning. How is a territory able to refer to a more systemic approach rather than to a mobile communicational reality? How can this distance be reconciled with the effects of proximity? The generalised reconstruction of the public space, which is almost intrinsic in this geographical entity, supposes cultural re-combinations in both the written and audiovisual press, and a recalibration of the status of intellectuals in search of new legitimacy. Intellectuals are both close because of their concerns and distant because of their isolation – at the place where this modern globality,

beyond the question of a specific "Baltic area", affects the usual forms of mediation as exercised by intellectuals.

Conclusion

10 By re-enacting actual experiences, the present consideration of this subject matter will make it possible to understand the complexity of territorial phenomena, namely the "transfrontier" nature of the media, as well as the meaning of "Baltic", analysed more broadly as the meeting-point for transdisciplinary thinking. Lastly, each case supposes a common theoretical in-depth approach to the status of mediation and the role of intellectuals in a more globalised public space which exacerbates local identities. It is then open to question whether this new approach to geographical proximity within a more open public area promotes the activation of forms of networking. If the frontiers which have become porous in a context of economic globalisation and better interconnected intellectual networks, a context supposed to allow the sharing of resources and skills, how are we to take into account the effects of this globalisation, qualified here as "fragmented", in the framework of a polycentric Europe, symbolised today by this end to east/west bipolarity? We agree with Edgar Morin (1990:258), who felt that "the associative schemes would be able to intersect, overlap, extend, and develop in networks that are meta-national; continental, and even planetary already". That is our conclusion: to be able to reach beyond the "Globaltic" and understand how this space has also made it possible to renew some of our approaches and revise a number of concepts.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ascherson N., 1996, *Black sea*, London, J. Cape.

Auchet M., dir., 1999, *Les pays nordiques et le dialogue interculturel*, Nancy, Presses universitaires de Nancy.

Auchet M., Bourguignon A., dir., 2001, *Aspects d'une dynamique régionale : les pays nordiques dans le contexte de la Baltique*, Nancy, Presses universitaires de Nancy.

Boyer R., Gravier M., Jeannin P., 1981, *Mers du Nord et Baltique*, Paris, Éd. Arts et métiers graphiques.

Braudel F., 1949, *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II*, 2 vol., Paris, A. Colin, 1979.

Castells M., 1997, *Le pouvoir de l'identité. L'ère de l'information*, trad. de l'anglais par P. Chemla, Paris, Fayard, 1999.

Clifford J., 1997, *Routes : Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, Boston, Harvard University Press.

Colas D., 2002, dir., *L'Europe post-communiste*, Paris, Presses universitaires de France.

Deprez C., 2003, « La télévision indienne : un modèle d'appropriation culturelle », *Questions de communication*, 3, pp. 169-183.

Kirby D., 1995, *The Baltic World 1772-1993 : Europe's Northern Periphery in an Age of Change*, London & New York, Longman.

Klinge M., 1994, *Östersjövärlden*, Helsinki, Otava.

Lauristin M., Vihalemm P., 1997, *Return to the Western World : Cultural and Political Perspectives on the Estonian Post-Communist Transition*, Tartu, Tartu University Press.

Morin E., 1990, *Penser l'Europe*, Paris, Éd. du Seuil.

Plasseraud Y., 2003, *Les États baltiques. Les sociétés gigognes. La dialectique Minorités-Majorités*, Crozon, Éd. Armeline.

Sites internet

www.baltictimes.com

www.hri.org/nodes/baltics.html

www.ciesin.ee

www.northerndimension.org/

www.regard-est.com

NOTES

1. A term used further to our various field surveys in India on the impact of television in rural areas which correlates local and global (cf. Deprez, 2003).
2. The anthropological approach adopted by James Clifford (1997:7) highlights the relationship between global and local: based on "[...] emerging conceptions of translocal instead of global or universal culture [...] new theoretical paradigms explicitly articulate local and global processes in relational, non-teleological ways. [...] The new paradigms begin with historical contact – with entanglement at intersecting regional, national and transnational levels".
3. This documentation is the product of a research programme entitled *Media, societies around the Baltic Sea*, initiated in 1998 in an inter-disciplinary framework by the University of Södertorn/ Stockholm, which held various conferences in Tampere (Finland), Saint Petersburg (Russia), then in Paris on 24 and 25 October 2003 at the Finnish Institute. The final seminar (*The media and societies around the Baltic*) brought together Patrick Aker (University of South Stockholm), Risto Alapuro (University of Helsinki), Jan Ekecrantz (University of Stockholm), Kristian Feigelson (University of Paris 3), Martine Godet (EHESS), Maria Holubowicz (University of Paris 3), Madeleine Hurd (Harvard University/University of South Stockholm), Yakov Iosskievitch (Saint Petersburg Cultural Institute), Risto Kunélius (University of Tampere/Finland), François de Labriolle (INALCO), Marju Lauristin (University of Tartu/Estonia), Tom Olsson (University of South Stockholm), Michael Palmer (University of Paris 3), Nicolas Pélissier (University of Nice/ Sophia Antipolis), Yves Plasseraud (University of Vilnius), Elisabeth du Réau (University of Paris 3), Kristina Riegert (University of Stockholm), Charles Urjewicz (INALCO), Peter Vihalemm (University of Tartu). We would also like to thank Céline Bayou, researcher at La Documentation Française for proofreading this report, and for her insightful comments. Our thanks also go to Jukka Havu and Satu Kiosola of the Finnish Institute.